

HMI Probation Stakeholder Survey 2015

Summary report

December 2015

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1. Introduction

This report sets out the main findings from the first annual survey of HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) stakeholders. The survey was designed to seek stakeholders' views on various aspects of the Inspectorate's work, including its communications and reports as well as its adherence to core values and other positive characteristics. The views expressed within the survey and future annual surveys will be used by the Inspectorate to help understand its strengths and weaknesses and to identify potential areas for development and improvement, thus maximising the quality, effectiveness and impact of its work.

2. Methodology

The survey was available online from 29th July to 31st August 2015. It included a range of fixed response questions and some supplementary open-ended questions about HMI Probation's values, characteristics, reports and communications. A link to the survey was emailed directly to registered stakeholders, as well as advertised on Twitter and through the HMI Probation alerts service and communications. It was also promoted through the Probation Institute and Youth Justice Board.

2.1 The sample

By the time the survey had closed, 186 usable returns had been received.¹ Nearly half (47%) of the respondents received an email directly from HMI Probation, and almost all (44%) the remainder had received the link in an email from a friend or colleague.

As shown by Table 1, the largest single role represented within the sample was youth justice manager (30%), followed by Magistrate/Judge (19%), probation partner (15%) and then probation manager (11%). Those working with adult offenders directly (manager, practitioner or partner) accounted for 30% of respondents, with an equivalent figure for those working with children of 32%.

¹ Throughout the paper, percentages may not always add up to 100 due to rounding. The number of missing responses for each question is indicated below the tables/figures.

Table 1: Stakeholders' declared roles

	n	Percent
Manage youth justice	45	30%
Magistrate or Judge	28	19%
Probation partner	22	15%
Manage probation	16	11%
Work for another inspectorate or similar	13	9%
Work on criminal justice policy	8	5%
Work with adult offenders	6	4%
Work with children who offended	2	1%
Youth justice partner	1	1%
Politician	2	1%
Academic	2	1%
Offender	3	1%
Total	148	100%

Base: All (148; 38 missing)

Table 2 sets out the stakeholders' identified employers. Almost one quarter (24%) of the respondents defined themselves as employed by the Ministry of Justice. Approximately one in five (19%) worked for youth offending services, and 16% worked for another government department/agency (mostly local government). Only six percent of stakeholders were from Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs).

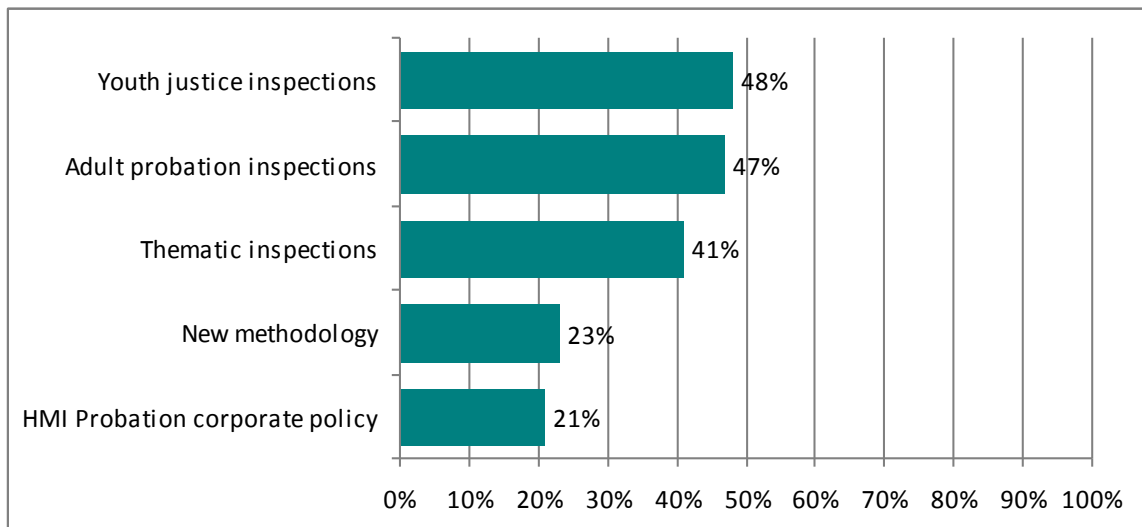
Table 2: Stakeholders' identified employers

	n	Percent
Ministry of Justice	43	24%
Youth Offending Team/Service	34	19%
Other government department, agency or arms-length body	29	16%
Not employed	16	9%
Community Rehabilitation Company	11	6%
Voluntary sector organisation	11	6%
Youth Justice Board	9	5%
National Offender Management Service	3	2%
HM Courts & Tribunals Service	4	2%
Private sector organisation	3	2%
National Probation Service	2	1%
Other	18	10%
Total	183	100%

Base: All (183; 3 missing)

The fairly equal split between adult and youth justice backgrounds was reflected in the areas of interest expressed by stakeholders (see Figure 1).² Just under half (48%) were interested in youth justice inspections, with almost the same number (47%) interested in adult probation inspections. Slightly fewer (41%) were interested in thematic inspections. About one quarter (23%) of stakeholders were interested in the Inspectorate’s development of a new inspection methodology.

Figure 1: Particular areas of interest for stakeholders



Base: All (186; no missing)

As the sample is self-selecting, the survey findings presented in the rest of this report should not be viewed as being necessarily representative of all stakeholders. In terms of respondents’ ability to provide informed views, there was some concern from magistrates that they had not been previously aware of HMI Probation, with suggestions being made that more engagement should take place with the courts.

I completed this survey because it was sent to all Magistrates in my Local Justice Area and I thought it right to contribute. But almost every answer is 'don't know' and on reflection it is striking that I (and I suspect my colleagues) had never come across HMI Probation before. I don't doubt that it is important but I question why it does not engage more with the sentencers.

Magistrate

² Respondents could choose multiple areas of interest.

3. Findings

3.1 Communications

Approximately three in five (58%) of the stakeholders had visited the HMI Probation website in the year before the survey. Of these respondents, the section that most recalled viewing was 'Inspection reports', which almost nine in ten (87%) had visited (see Table 3). Almost half (46%) had visited the section that described inspections, while 18% had visited the corporate pages listing information about the Inspectorate.

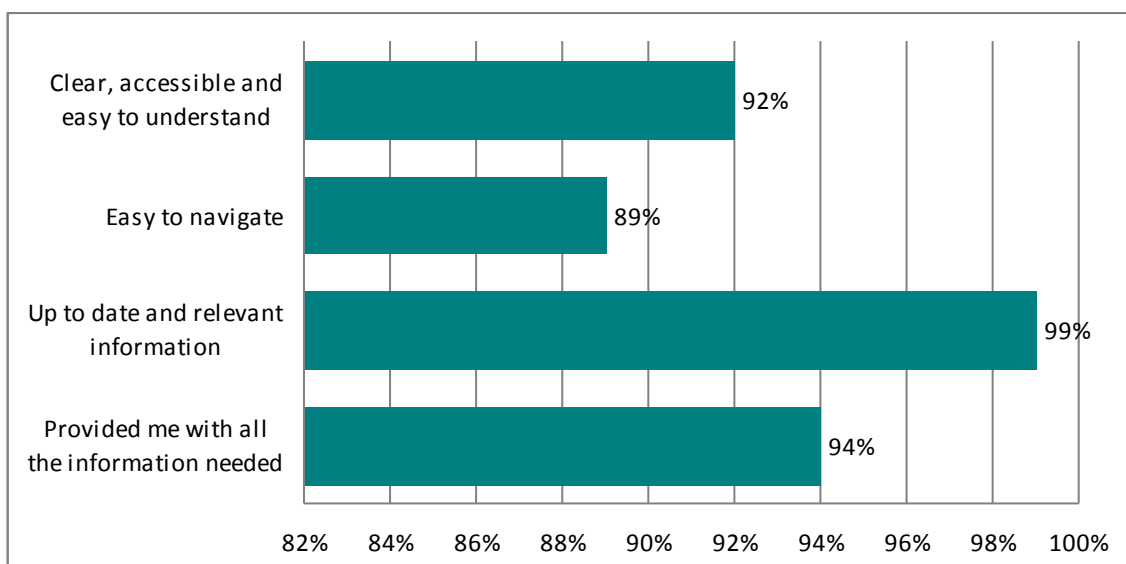
Table 3: Sections of the HMI Probation website viewed by stakeholders

	n	Percent
About HMI Probation section	34	18%
About inspections section	36	46%
Inspection reports	69	87%
Media section	7	9%
Cymraeg	0	0%
Total	79	100%

Base: All who viewed website in the past year (79; no missing)

The website was clearly seen as relevant and informative by almost all those stakeholders who had visited it in the past year (Figure 2). Only one respondent disagreed that the information on the site was up to date and relevant (99%), and 94% of stakeholders considered that the site provided them with all the information that they needed. Agreement with statements about the accessibility of the website was slightly less unanimous, but still high at about nine in ten stakeholders – the site was easy to navigate for 89% of those who visited, and it was clear, accessible and easy to understand for 92% of stakeholders.

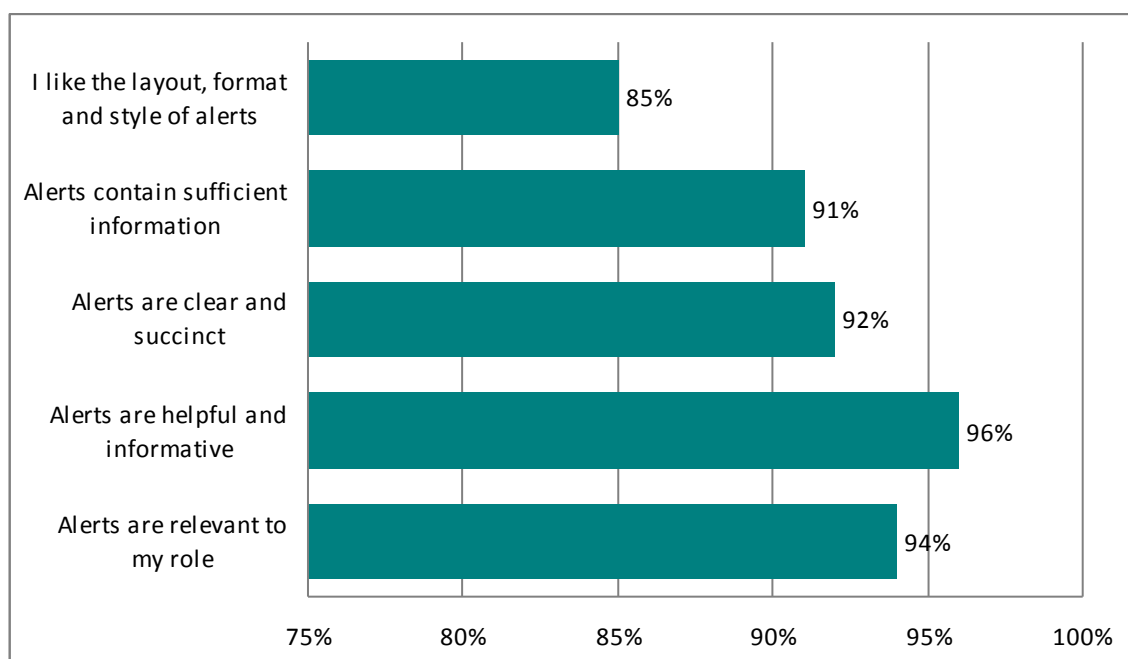
Figure 2: Proportion of stakeholders agreeing with statements about the website



Base: All who viewed website in the past year (69-75; 4-10 missing)

Approximately three in ten (29%) of the stakeholders reported that they received alerts from HMI Probation. As shown by Figure 3, the alerts were clearly well received by these respondents – more than nine in ten considered them to be relevant to their role (94%), helpful and informative (96%), clear and succinct (92%), and to contain sufficient information (91%). Only slightly fewer (85%) stakeholders liked the format of the alerts. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the large majority (85%; n=41) of stakeholders who received the alerts would recommend the service to other colleagues.

Figure 3: Proportion of stakeholders agreeing with statements about alerts



Base: All receiving alerts (41-48; 5-12 missing)

About one in ten (9%) stakeholders responding to the survey stated that they followed HMI Probation on Twitter. Some argued that the Inspectorate could do more to embrace new and innovative methods of dissemination.

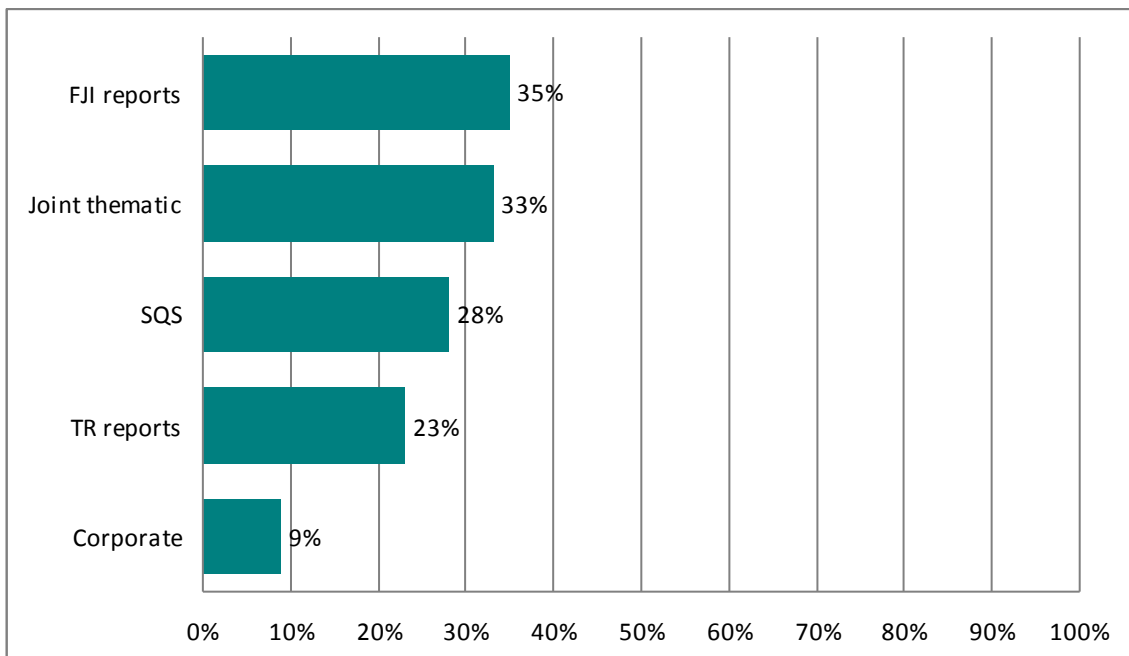
More could be done to communicate the findings of reports through both traditional and non-traditional routes.

Works in criminal justice policy

3.2 Reports

Just over half (57%) of the stakeholders stated that they had read an HMI Probation report in the past year. As shown by Figure 4, about a third (35%) had read a Full Joint Inspection (FJI) report, with the same proportion (35%) reading a joint thematic report. Just under one quarter (23%) had read one of the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) reports.

Figure 4: Reports read by stakeholders in the past year



Base: All (186)

The reports were generally very well received by the stakeholders who had read them in the past year (Figure 5). All but one (99%) respondent felt that the structures of the reports they had read were easy to follow, and a similarly high number (96%) found them easy to understand. The large majority of stakeholders found that they were able to apply Inspectorate findings, with the reports being seen as useful (95%) and a similar number (93%) agreeing that they had influenced their work. About nine in ten (91%) respondents felt equality and diversity issues were addressed adequately in the reports.

Despite this view of clarity, there were some concerns expressed in the comments regarding inconsistency in the use of language, potentially introducing bias into the narrative.

They are written in a deficit model which does not always recognise good work sufficiently. At times the writing can lead to an over positive or over negative emphasis. i.e. 'just under three quarters were of good standard' has a different immediate sub text to 'over a quarter were not of good standard'. The problem is that there is little or no consistency in this type of approach.

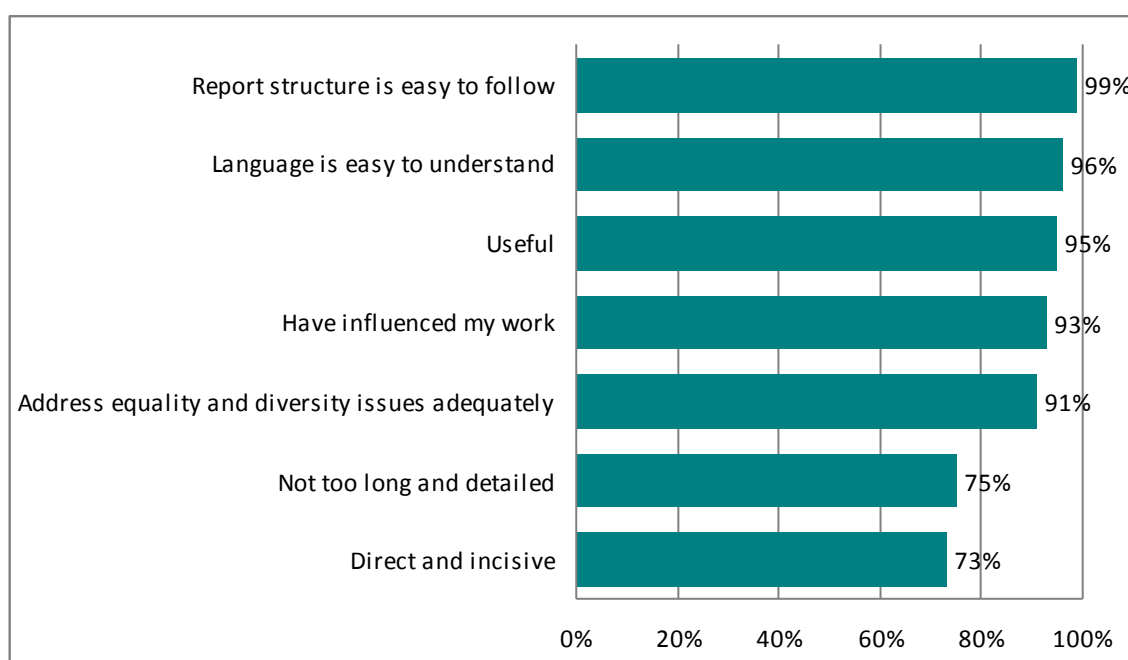
Youth Offending Team (YOT) Manager

The above quotation mentions a deficit model. The negative approach of reports was another recurrent theme in comments; the view being that more room was made for criticisms than for good promising practice and solutions.

When one is the subject of the report the language seems very negative and half pint empty rather than as positive as possible whilst acknowledging gaps and areas for improvement.

YOT Manager

Figure 5: Proportion of stakeholders agreeing with statements about reports



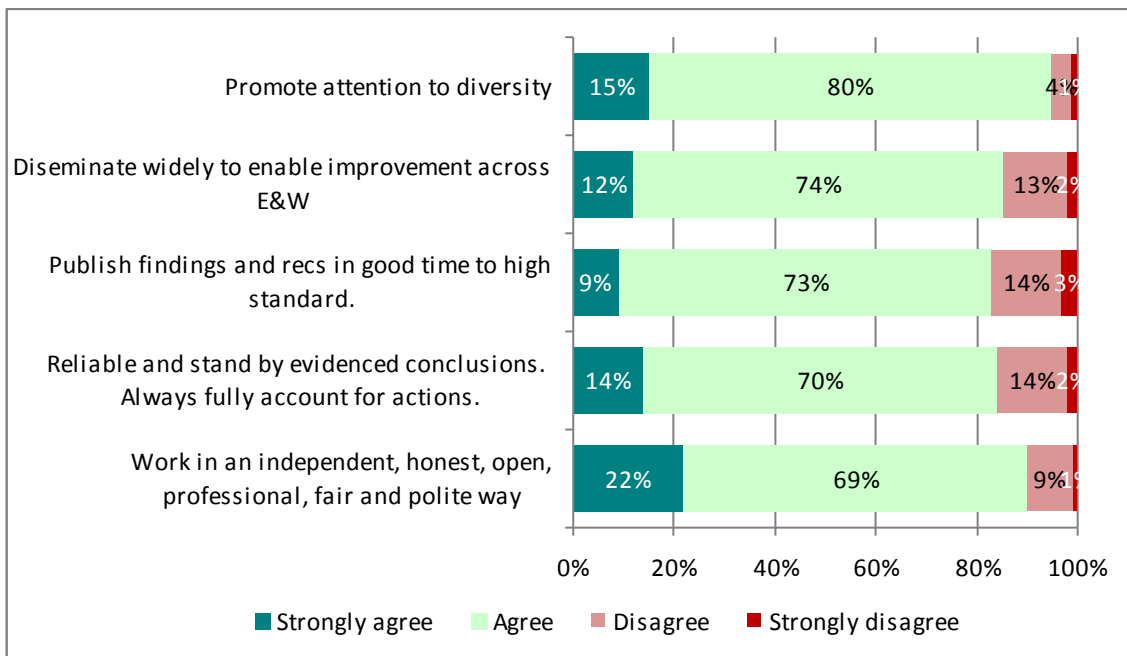
Base: All who have read reports in the past year (varied from 79 to 96; 9 to 26 missing)

The numbers agreeing that the Inspectorate's reports were 'to the point' were slightly lower. Three quarters (75%) felt that they were not too long or detailed (asked in reverse), and a similar proportion (73%) felt that they were direct and incisive. Although this still represents the majority, it suggests that consideration could be given to ways of communicating findings to audiences who are interested in differing levels of detail. The comments included findings being blunted by the number of recommendations and stakeholders finding it difficult to contextualise where they stood in relation to others, i.e. were their results good or bad?

3.2 Values

Stakeholders were asked to rate HMI Probation against its stated values. As shown by Figure 6, more than four out of five respondents who answered these questions agreed that each of the values applied to the Inspectorate.

Figure 6: Proportion of stakeholders who agreed that stated values apply to HMI Probation



Base: All (104-139; 47-82 missing)

More than nine in ten (91%) considered that the Inspectorate works in an independent, honest, open, fair and polite way, with more than one in five (22%) "strongly" agreeing with this statement. Almost all (95%) stakeholders felt that attention to diversity was successfully promoted. The comment below highlights one stakeholder's view regarding the importance of capturing impact in relation to diversity within the new delivery landscape.

The Inspectorate should consider how it addresses the impact of services on specific client groups, as it has done in previous thematic inspection reports. The change in practices for women, young adult, BAME, and older offenders will be crucial to monitor. Additionally we should take care to monitor the impact of new arrangements on people with multiple and complex needs, especially those who are serving short prison sentences, and would have previously not received any supervision in the community. Concerns have equally been expressed by the voluntary sector around services for those with disabilities, from equalities groups, or those with leaving care status (or a history in the care system).

Works in policy making

The adherence to Inspectorate values that fewer stakeholders were convinced about related to report publications rather than behaviour or ideals – less than one in ten (9%) strongly agreeing that findings and recommendations were published in good time to a high standard (17% disagreeing).

Reports are published a long time after the inspection which means that the recommendations are at times out of date and no longer relevant

YOT Manager

The second lowest agreement was around the reliability and evidence for conclusions (16% disagreeing). The qualitative comments indicated that some stakeholders were not convinced that the Inspectorate was as critical or contextual in its evaluation of evidence as it could be. The difference between the tone of verbal feedback and the eventual written scores was noted by some respondents, and some had reservations about inspectors' benchmarks due to their inability to verify judgements by knowing which cases received which scores.

"Stand by the conclusions" - you don't do this if you don't tell us which cases you disagreed with!

YOT Manager

As a learning exercise the SQS (Short Quality Screening) inspection could be much more meaningful if you had feedback on the individual cases rather than general feedback that can't be attributed to a specific case, i.e. 20% of plans are inadequate; well if 20 cases were inspected, which are the four that needed improvement?

YOT Manager

The third lowest agreement related to the Inspectorate disseminating widely to enable improvement across England and Wales (15% disagreeing), with the comments tending to emphasise a need to share learning and promising practice.

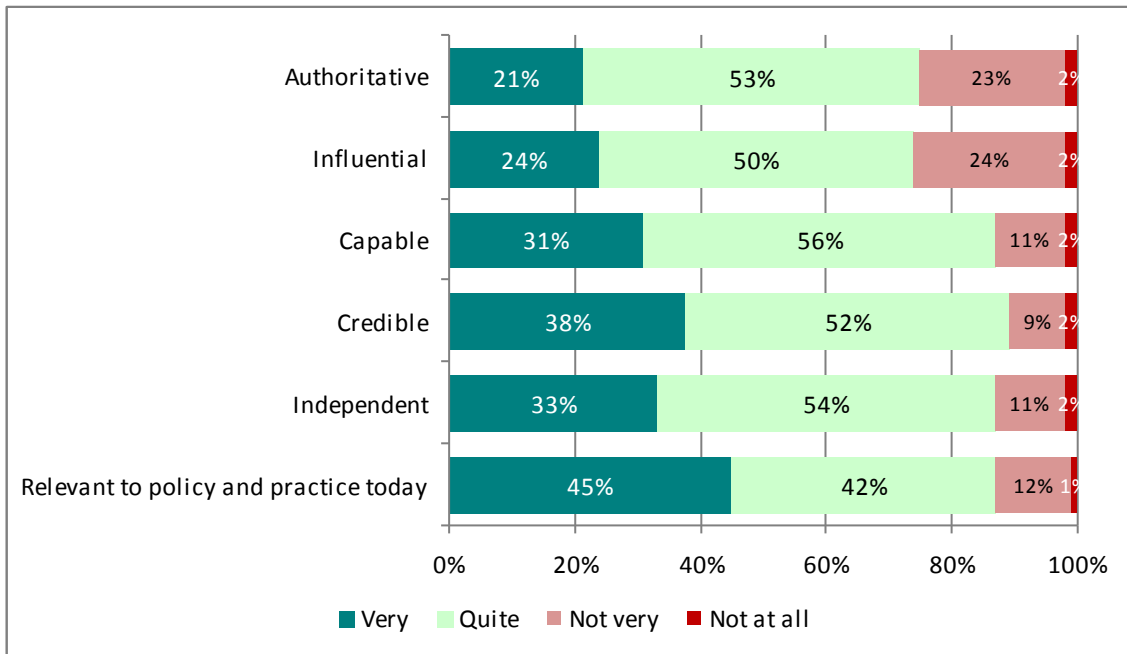
Reports are disseminated widely but if more detail on good practice were in the reports then learning would be greatly improved.

YOT Manager

3.3 Characteristics

Stakeholders were also asked the extent to which particular positive characteristics were reflected by HMI Probation. Agreement was high in relation to **relevance** to policy and practice, with the highest proportion (45%) of respondents agreeing that the Inspectorate “very” much reflected this characteristic, with only 13% negatively responding (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of stakeholders who agreed that HMI Probation reflects particular characteristics



Base: All (123-131; 55-63 missing)

There was also relatively strong support for the items associated with being **credible**. The word credible itself had the second highest number (38%) agreeing that it “very” much applied to HMI Probation, and even fewer negatively responding than for relevance (11%). Similar levels of agreement were reached with the related items of being **independent** (only 11% negative) and **capable** (13% negative). Notably, a number of stakeholders did express concerns that the Inspectorate’s independence was or could become increasingly under threat, and that a clear voice of critique needed to be maintained.

I think you do work in an honest /open professional way (I always have believed this). However I think the Inspectorate is now under a lot of political pressure and I feel that your independence may be questioned.

Probation service Manager

It was the items associated with the **authoritative** strand that had lower consensus amongst stakeholders. One quarter (26%) gave a negative response to HMI Probation

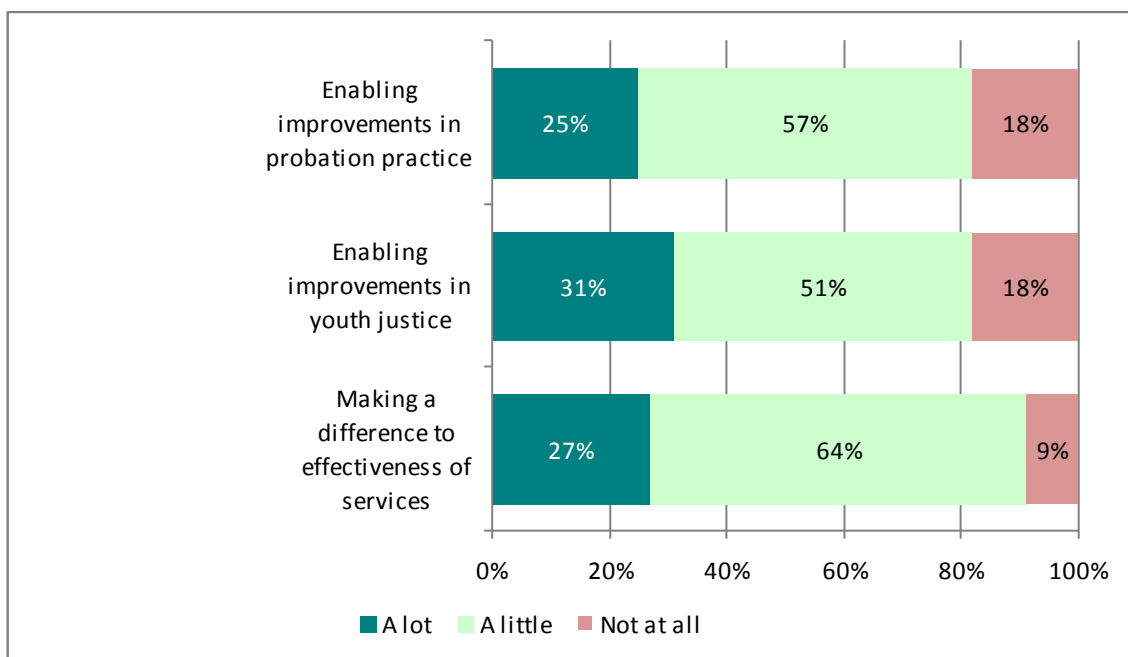
being authoritative and a similar number (26%) were negative with the related characteristic of **influential**.

A further set of items specifically focused on the impact that HMI Probation was thought to have. Interestingly, between one quarter and one half of respondents for each item did not know, indicating that further work could be done in this area. For those that did have a view on impact, the reaction was largely positive (see Figure 8). More than 9 in 10 (91%) stakeholders felt that the Inspectorate was making a difference to the effectiveness of services, and more than 8 in 10 (82%) felt that it was enabling improvements in probation practice (same figure in youth justice). One youth justice practitioner suggested that increasing the local assessor scheme would further enable improvements.

Should offer more managers opportunity to be trained as local assessors, even if not required for HMI Probation inspection purposes, such training could improve effective practice within local YOT.

Youth Justice practitioner

Figure 8: Proportion of stakeholders who agreed that HMI Probation enables improvements



Base: All (77-109; 77-109 missing)

A note of caution was raised by one YOT manager who, while positive about HMI Probation, argued that services could be negatively affected if the focus was on processes rather than outcomes.

I would like to see less emphasis on prescriptive YOS (Youth Offending Scheme) inspections and more on supporting us to deliver. So we need to change the emphasis to one where HMI Probation is not so worried about process and focusing on outcomes. We need more recognition of the impact HMI Probation can have on good services, with inspection preparation often taking attention away from front line delivery to recording. We are often told to develop innovation, yet the inspection process militates against this due to the focus on keeping records fully up to date. However, you do a good job overall and I'm quite happy with the service. We also need you to visit every three years at least to keep focus on performance within the YOS.

YOT Manager

A number of stakeholders expressed support for the new Quality and Impact (Q&I) inspection methodology.

CRCs are facing a great deal of assurance requests and audits. At the consultation events, we heard that HMI Probation hope to offer something above this, in terms of best practice development, and this is positive. It was also reassuring to hear that the new method will ensure all providers across the supply chain are part of the inspection process. Lastly, I do make a plea for independence in the face of political pressure.

Probation Manager

4. Conclusions

The results in the survey were largely positive. Whilst the sampling for the survey does not provide fully representative findings, the following appear as indicative themes and messages for HMI Probation to consider:

- The survey raised questions regarding the awareness of HMI Probation's work among specific sub-groups, particularly magistrates.
- The HMI Probation website was mainly used by stakeholders to access reports, and was considered relevant, informative and accessible. Subscriptions to alerts were not widespread among the respondents, but, when used, they were considered relevant and useful.
- Reports were considered to be clear and useful, with the findings being used to influence work. There were some doubts about the incisiveness of reports, partly in relation to brevity for some audiences and partly to do with the specificity of criticisms and recommendations. There were some concerns about reports having a deficit approach and not focusing on enablers and promising practice.
- Stakeholders rated HMI Probation highly against the majority of its core values and against various positive characteristics. The Inspectorate was perceived to be making a difference to the effectiveness of services, with its work being viewed as *relevant* to policy and practice, and *credible*. There was less agreement in terms of the Inspectorate being *authoritative*, and some concerns regarding the lack of transparency in the use of evidence, the timeliness of publications and an insufficient promotion of promising practice.